



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

HARVARD THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

VOLUME XI

JULY, 1918

NUMBER 3

THE ANABAPTISTS AND MINOR SECTS IN THE REFORMATION

RUFUS M. JONES

HAVERFORD COLLEGE

Parallel with the main current of the Protestant Reformation there ran from the very beginning another powerful current which has always received far less consideration from historians than it deserves. Some have supposed it to be a mis-guided, if not a monstrous, undertaking. Others have considered it one more among the many "lost causes" about which history is more or less silent. Neither of these positions is, however, quite tenable. It was, like Bunker Hill in the American Revolution, "a battle lost but a cause won," since nearly everything which these minor reformers aimed at has since been achieved or is on the way to achievement.

The leaders of this parallel movement were ruthlessly martyred, their followers were exterminated, their books and tracts were suppressed, their aims were slanderously misinterpreted, their brave efforts were as rapidly as possible overwhelmed with oblivion; but strangely enough their ideas have triumphed. Their truths — though they themselves are dead — are marching on, like John Brown's spirit. Their vision of what Christianity should be is much closer to the heart of our own religion today in England and America than is either the theology

of Luther or the dogmatic system of Calvin. There is no occasion to belittle the service of the great reformers, the reformers of folio size, like Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. They did a monumental piece of work; they changed the course of history decidedly for the better, and they have been given, and rightly so, their place with the immortals. There is, nevertheless, much lumber, sheer dead wood, in their semi-mediæval systems. They carried on many aspects of pre-Reformation Christianity which might profitably have been sloughed off, and they loaded human minds and hearts with some tragic burdens which might well have been spared. It is no doubt easier to see that fact today than it was to see it four hundred years ago, and we ought not to expect at the beginning of a period the critical insight which comes through the cumulative experience of the years.

These neglected reformers — of the quarto or octavo size perhaps — did see on the spot then that much of the wood in the new systems was already dead, that many of the tragic burdens which the reformers were loading on human shoulders were too heavy to be borne, and were in any case unnecessary. They wanted a “root and branch” reformation, a thorough-going reformation, a radical purification and reorganization. Though they belonged to the scholarly class, and came, almost without exception, from the universities, they were in deep sympathy with the people. They thought and spoke for toilers and peasants. They had entered into the meaning of the social struggle and had come under the burden of human suffering; they intensely felt the social wrongs of the world, and they came forth as the champions of the reformation which the common man needed and demanded. They failed in their day to carry through their programme, but it was in the main a noble aspiration, much of it was wisely conceived, historical

experience has confirmed many of the aims embodied in it, and it deserves patient and impartial, if not sympathetic, study.

One of the most interesting historical questions is that concerned with the spiritual pedigree of the movement, or more properly of the movements, for it was not ever, as we shall see, well unified into any single system. There must obviously have been *some* pre-Reformation preparation for it, since it burst forth almost simultaneously at many widely sundered places, in many lands, and it accumulated at once an immense popular volume and momentum. Wherever it appeared it took on, with all its particular variations, striking similarities, at least in its central purpose and its fundamental principles. The leaders plainly had a large stock of ideas and ideals in common. There must have been some background explanation. Unfortunately it is not possible yet to produce definite documentary evidence to prove beyond question that these new groups which formed at the beginning of the Reformation were the direct product of earlier groups of mystics, Waldenses, Wyclifites, Hussites, Brothers of the Common Life, or Spiritual Franciscans.¹ And yet it is an unmistakable fact that there did exist in unbroken succession, especially through the Rhine valley and in Switzerland, hidden groups of "heretics" and mystics. The puritan-minded Waldenses were never suppressed on the continent, as the Lollards never were in England. The writings of the mystics of the fourteenth, and especially the writings of the great Brother of the Common Life, Thomas à Kempis of the fifteenth century, were widely circulated and devotedly read. These books, as we now know, exercised

¹ Ludwig Keller was convinced that his researches established this point, but other scholars, including Dr. Ernst Troeltsch, do not endorse his claim. See especially Keller's *Ein Apostel der Wiedertäufer*. Troeltsch's great work, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (Tübingen, 1912), is a very valuable contribution in this field, and I have carefully re-read the section of it bearing on my subject before writing this article.

a profound influence on Luther, and there is much to indicate that they exerted a still more profound influence upon the popular leaders with whom we are now concerned. The essential reason for thinking so is that the body of ideas in the new movement is uniformly so harmonious and consonant with the teaching and aspirations of these mystics and with the heretical groups which had already suggested the lines of reformation that were needed to restore real, that is, apostolic, Christianity.

Two events woke the quiet, long-suffering successors of the mystics and heretical groups from mere dumb hopes to eager, vivid expectation—the powerful teaching of the humanists and the dynamic message of Luther. It is impossible to miss or ignore the direct influence of the humanists upon the leaders of this common-man's reformation. It is most apparent in the new social and ethical emphasis. They one and all show a revolt from the old theology. It has lost both its interest and its reality for them. Something else more real and more appealing has come into the foreground of their consciousness. They have drawn much closer to the Jesus of the Gospel than had anybody else since St. Francis. They are more attracted to Him and to His wonderful words than to the elaborate metaphysical accounts of His being and nature. They turn eagerly to the positive teachings of this great Master of life as they find them revealed in the New Testament, which the humanists had helped them discover. They learned too from these same humanists how vastly different the Church of their time was from the Church in its pristine apostolic purity and power. Then came Luther's electrifying message of faith and freedom, shaking them entirely awake. They almost all refer to his quick and powerful word. They rose at once to meet it. They thought he was to lead them into a new epoch and be their champion in the work of building a new Church. *The Liberty of a Christian Man* and the

Babylonian Captivity of the Church, as they read them in 1520, seemed like a new revelation from God. They felt that the hour had struck and that the new heaven and the new earth were within hail.

Two pretty clearly marked tendencies appear in this general effort of the period to secure the type of reformation which the common man was striving for, though it must be recognized that the entire undertaking always remained throughout somewhat fluid, uncompact, and unorganized. The two typical tendencies were: (1) in the direction of what is historically denominated "Anabaptism"; and (2) a serious aim to work out a truly spiritual Christianity, winnowed of the accumulations of paganism, superstition, theology, and secularism. We may therefore loosely divide the leaders of the popular movement into "Anabaptists" and "Spiritual Reformers," though the division is not a sharp one, and some leaders do not easily come under either label while others seem to come under both labels. The Anabaptists numerically bulk much larger than the second group, though in historical influence the former are not more important than the latter. The first group of Anabaptists to differentiate and to formulate and express its principles was the Swiss group in and about Zürich and St. Gall. The leaders were young scholars and priests whose hearts, "under the cross," had been made one with the common people. They were genuine shepherds of the flock.

The most important men who led this movement were Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, William Reublin, Simon Stumpf, and Ludwig Hetzer. They had all been powerfully affected by their reading and study of the Bible, now for the first time truly a book of the people. They began to preach to their flocks a fresh message drawn from the prophets and the Gospel. The popular response was immediate, and they found themselves, without intending it, the champions of a new cause. As Zwingli

moved forward to secure a reformation of the Swiss Churches, these men gladly joined him and were content to follow his leading. They soon discovered, however, that he was moving toward a reformation which was far too restrained and limited to suit their conception of what the times demanded. They engaged in public discussions with him, and found that he was voicing the reforming aims of the nobles and upper class but was unresponsive to the deep needs of the masses whom they represented. Gradually they felt compelled to deviate from the course which Zwingli was steering and to proclaim a more radical programme. They came across the writings of the "new prophets" of the people, Thomas Münzer and Carlstadt, and they deeply sympathized with the aspiration for a more inward religion which these men voiced, but they thoroughly disapproved of Münzer's support of popular insurrection and his passionate appeal for the oppressed to use the sword. They declined to employ the world's way to success and trusted wholly to the inherent power of ideas and to the invisible help of God. What they demanded as the most urgent need of the times was the complete reformation of the Church to make it fit the New Testament. They insisted first of all that the Church of Christ must be "a congregation of believers." Only those, they claimed, who have hearts of faith, spiritual insight, obedient wills, and real religious experience can compose a Christian Church. A mixed multitude of good and bad, of saints and sinners, cannot make a true Church. The historical compromise with the world, the scaling of the Christian standards down to the level of the nominal, secular membership, seemed to them to be the greatest source of the "apostasy" of the Church. They now proposed to wipe the slate clean, to make a new start, and to form a Church consisting only of Christians, only of the faithful. It seemed to them that the custom of baptizing

infants, who from the nature of the case could not exercise faith, was one fertile cause of the degeneracy. It stood in their eyes as the mark of apostasy from Apostolic Christianity, somewhat as circumcision stood out, for St. Paul in the Galatian controversy, as the peculiar mark of Judaistic legalism. If the Church were henceforth to be pure and Christian, then it must have no rites or practices which did not attach directly to personal faith, and it must have no members who had not positively experienced in their own souls a living faith. They had little primary interest in sacraments at best, since their main concern was for a strongly ethical and social Christianity, but they believed that the primitive Christians practised baptism as an outward sign of an inward experience and as a testimony of fellowship in a visible Church. They proposed therefore to restore baptism to this primitive, apostolic function. In 1525 Grebel baptized Blaurock, a devoted Christian man and one of the band of preachers who had accepted the radical attitude. Blaurock thereupon, "in deep fear of God," baptized many others, and a community of "brothers," as they liked to call themselves, began to grow and to differentiate from the main Zwinglian Reformation. These dissenters were given the nickname "Anabaptists," which means re-baptizers, and the name stuck to them and widened out to include almost all types of persons who dissented from the Roman and Reformed Churches. It became the opprobrious label for the entire effort of the common man for a reformation. The Swiss dissenters themselves refused to accept the name or to admit its implication. They declared that they were not "re-baptizers." The baptism which they had received as infants, they claimed, was no baptism at all, since baptism cannot take place without positive personal faith on the part of the recipient. Adult baptism taken in faith as a sign of fellowship in the pure church of Christ

was, in their view, the one and only baptism — not a “second baptism.”

As their aims grew defined, the Anabaptists endeavored (1) to construct a Church entirely on the model of the New Testament, in every particular a copy of the apostolic pattern. (2) This was to be a visible Church, composed only of believers, a community of saints, winnowed and separated from the unbelieving and unspiritual. (3) This state of purity in the Church was to be preserved by a rigorous use of discipline. Those who fall below the Christian standard and become corrupt or contaminated by the world, or who compromise with the world, must be excluded by ban from membership in the Church, that is, there must be a continuous use of the winnowing fan. (4) The Church must be completely severed from all entangling alliance with the state. The Church and State have officially nothing in common. Membership in the former is a free act. There must be no kind of compulsion in spiritual matters. Through faith and experience the Church lives and grows and enlarges its fellowship. It influences the character of those who form the State, but its authority is indirect, not direct. In the sphere of religion the State has no authority; conscience in its relation with God is to be absolutely free and untrammelled. (5) All Christians have the same fundamental rights as the clergy have. There are no classes, no orders, no fixed distinctions. The only differences are differences of gift and function. (6) The movement tended, though more or less unconsciously, to treat the Gospel as “a new law,” to be literally followed and obeyed, very much as was done in the earlier groups of Waldenses and Lollards. Under this influence most branches of the Anabaptists refused to take oaths, set themselves against war, and denied that a Christian is allowed under any circumstances to take human life. With this rigorous literalism they also joined a moral

strictness of life more extreme than that which marked any other section of the Reformation, even that of the Calvinistic churches. (7) They not only proclaimed freedom of conscience; they bore a powerful testimony to the august authority of conscience. They arrived at the conviction that conscience is an inner sanctuary or shechinah of God Himself, and here as nowhere else they believed the voice of the living God is heard. With this exalted sense of an inner connection with the divine, they suffered and died for what seemed to them eternal truth and everlasting righteousness, and in doing so they gave a new note of emphasis to the moral worth of conscience.

Two very powerful leaders, of German origin and education, soon threw in their lot with the Swiss dissenters and stood out at once as the prophets of the new movement, Baltazar Hübmaier, born near Augsburg in 1480, and Hans Denck, a Bavarian, born about 1495. Hübmaier was a Doctor of Theology, one of the best scholars of his time, a humanist, a mystic, a powerful preacher, a high-minded, pure-hearted, brave man, and finally, in 1528, a martyr. His watchword, used on the title-page of his little books, was "Truth is immortal," and he maintained, even in the face of death, that *truth ultimately wins* in any contest. He accepted in full measure Luther's claim that faith—the soul's attitude of trust and confidence in God—is the fundamental basis of Christianity; only he went farther with the principle than Luther did and carried it out more consistently. Nothing in the sphere of religion can be accomplished, he held, without insight, faith, obedience, effort, conformity of heart and will with God. Religion must be from first to last a spiritual affair. Rites, ceremonies, magical or sacerdotal performances, cannot alter the ethical and inherent facts of life. "God," he declared in his *Apology*, "will have none of our Baal-cries." With

this central position fixed, Hübmaier labored valiantly to secure a reformation of the Church consonant with the spiritual character of apostolic Christianity. "I believe and confess" he wrote, "a holy catholic Church, which is a communion of saints, a brotherhood of devout and believing men."² Very large numbers were convinced by Hübmaier's preaching, and when his lips were sealed by the fagots in Vienna he had already carried his interpretation of religion into many lives both in Swiss and Austrian towns.³

Denck belongs very definitely among the "Spiritual Reformers"; but he was for a time identified with the Anabaptists and he undoubtedly exerted a very strong influence upon the movement in its early stage, though as his insight deepened and his views matured, his interpretation of Christianity took a broader outlook and a more universal aspect than most Anabaptists were ready for. For more than a year — September, 1525, to October, 1526 — Denck was in Augsburg endeavoring to organize and direct the popular movement toward reform, striving to check fanatical tendencies, opposing literalists and extremists, and putting forth strenuous efforts to deepen and spiritualize the throngs of enthusiastic "seekers."

Before the Anabaptist leaders had any opportunity to clarify their aims or to formulate their principles, the world took fright at the potential dangers of the movement and began suppressing the prominent exponents of it and endeavoring to obliterate it utterly. The uprising of the German peasants in 1525, in the hope of securing for themselves a measure of economic and social justice, gave the ruling class and the nobles a vivid sense of what might happen if these submerged peoples awakened, *found themselves*, and became an organized and directed

² Hübmaier's Twelve Articles of Faith.

³ It is estimated that six thousand persons became Anabaptists in and around Nikolsburg where Hübmaier preached.

force. Luther threw all the power of his pen, voice, and personality against the cause of the peasants. He wrote: "Whoever can should knock down, strangle, and stab insurgents, privately or publicly, and think nothing so venomous, pernicious, and devilish as an insurgent." He declared that those who died fighting against the peasants were "true martyrs before God," and that those who perish on the peasant side are "everlasting hell-brands."⁴ The long-suffering peasants, driven to the limit of endurance by their intolerable condition and inspired by the hope which the dawning reformation gave them, made their assault against the immovable wall of German authority, and failed. Münzer, the spiritual champion of their aspirations, went to death with them.

The early Anabaptist leaders, most of whom owed much to the dynamic, if not wisely directed zeal of Münzer, disapproved of the appeal to force and set themselves against insurrection. The Zürich society of "brothers" wrote to Münzer in September, 1524, urging him not to resort to violence. They say: "The Gospel and its followers should not be guarded by the sword, neither shall they so guard themselves, as, by what we hear from the Brethren, ye assume and pretend to be right. Truly-believing Christians are sheep in the midst of wolves, sheep ready for the slaughter; they must be baptized in fear and in need, in tribulation and death, that they may be tried to the last, and enter the fatherland of eternal peace, not with carnal but with spiritual weapons. They use neither the sword nor war."⁵ In spite of this gentle attitude, which beyond question characterized the main current of the popular reformation, all existing authorities, both of Church and State, were seized with intense antipathy toward these spiritual

⁴ Luther's tract, *Wider die Mordischen und Reubischen Rotter der Bauern*.

⁵ Letter written by Grebel to Münzer.

strivings of the common man, rose in might, and stamped it out in blood and fire. All the early leaders were either killed outright or so severely treated that death overtook them prematurely. The members of the group of "brothers" were dealt with as pests and outcasts, harried, imprisoned, banished, forced to live like beasts in dens and caves of the earth. It is impossible to tell what would have been the social and spiritual effect of this popular movement—which apparently, judging from its enthusiastic beginnings, would have swept in the common people of all countries—if it had been allowed to develop and realize its aims.⁶ Its first leaders were honest, sincere, unselfish men. They had no hostile intent. They sought no personal power or aggrandizement. They had no spirit of hate. They were fired with no class-animus. One of Denck's disciples, Hans Langenmantel, said: "The highest command of God is Love. Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself." They denied that it is right to try to gain spiritual ends by violence and sword. They trusted everything to the immortal power of truth, to the transforming force of ideas. They meant to inaugurate a Church which would expand and become the Kingdom of God on earth. They found a Golgotha instead.

The fury of the persecution, the appalling method of answering their dumb aspirations, produced at once a new type of leader and drove many of the Anabaptists toward fanaticism. Melchior Hoffman of Strasburg and his disciples are a different type from those whom I have considered. Always inclined to literalism, the movement now focussed upon a fervid expectation of the fulfilment of millennial hopes. Hoffman became the prophet of an intense chiliasm, and even proclaimed that

⁶ Even in the face of the terrific persecution that came down upon it as soon as it began, there were many thousands of Anabaptists in Middle Europe, and it has been estimated that thirty thousand were put to death in Holland alone.

the sword might be used to hasten the expected Kingdom of God. His Dutch disciples, Jan Matthys and Jan Bockelson, pushed the fanaticism of the radical wing to its wildest limit, and gave to the world by the spectacle of the Münster kingdom, a reason for the horror of Anabaptism and an excuse, after the fact, for its method of thorough extermination.⁷

A remnant of the original stock survived the double tragedy of persecution and fanaticism. The followers of Jacob Huter, a Tyrolese Anabaptist, who worked out a very interesting type of communistic society, succeeded in escaping from the annihilating persecutions of the Tyrol and migrated into Moravia. Eventually Huter was martyred. His last despairing cry is touching: "We know that it is not allowable to forbid the earth to us, for the earth is the Heavenly Father's." Huter's Communities were driven from place to place and reduced in numbers, but they were never wholly eradicated or suppressed. The Mennonites form another group of survivors. They owe their name and many of their characteristics to Menno Simon, born in West Friesland about 1496. He set himself to winnowing out the follies and fanaticisms of the Dutch Anabaptists, and he succeeded in organizing a strong branch of the movement, which has survived to the present time. He carried a puritan spirit into his group of followers, a determination to take the commands of Christ literally, and a tendency to form "a peculiar people," distinguished by dress, manners, separation from public affairs, and absence of ordained or salaried ministry. Sporadic individuals and even groups of Anabaptists escaped the violent Protestant and Catholic persecutions in most of the continental countries, and a large number, in one way or another, got into England. They merged with the

⁷ Hans Hut, a disciple of Münster, also preached apocalyptic hopes, though, unlike Hoffman, he remained non-resistant.

Lollards, and in some cases managed to escape the fires of Smithfield. They helped to form the numerous groups of heretics and dissenters which swarmed during the freer time of the English Commonwealth. They formed also the early nucleus of the famous Baptist Societies out of which the Baptists sprang.

The other fundamental tendency, which I have called the aim at a "spiritual reformation," was even more viscous or fluid, less compact and unified, than was the Anabaptist movement. One reason for the lack of organization and solidification is to be found in the strong mystical aspect of this reforming movement. Its leaders were hostile to systems. They were in revolt against dogmas, and they were equally opposed to the tyranny of authoritative, State-controlled, ecclesiastical institutions. They wanted to escape alike from a Hellenized and a Romanized Christianity. They saw no way to solve the problem without a complete shift of emphasis from the outward to the inward. The visible Church had tightened itself around the human spirit until no free area or independent sphere of activity seemed left for man's soul in its own right. These minor prophets of the Reformation were primarily prophets of the soul, champions of the free spirit. They had no architectonic genius. They felt no interest in rearing either structures of logic or institutional structures. Like Copernicus, they proposed a new centre, and their new centre was man's soul. They were always thinking and writing about the Church; but it was from first to last an invisible Church about which they were concerned, not the visible and empirical one. It is in this point that they differ most from the Anabaptists, with whom they had close sympathy and often warm fellowship. The Anabaptists were eager to create a new visible Church, and they took the written word of Scripture as their charter for it. The "Spiritual Re-

formers" accepted neither of those positions. They found the ultimate basis of religion in the Word of God, the Light of God, revealed in the interior life of man, and they thought of the Church as a spiritual organism of illuminated and inwardly guided persons. They were deeply read in the books of the German and Flemish mystics — Eckhart, Tauler, Ruysbroeck, *Theologia Germanica*, the writings of "the Friends of God," and *The Imitation of Christ*, but they were almost as much influenced by the Humanists, especially by Erasmus. They shared his faith in human freedom, his strong emphasis on the ethical aspect of the true Christian life, his dislike of theological dogma, and his appreciation of the pure and simple "gospel." They are mystics, but they are distinctly a new type of mystics. Through their dislike for theology and metaphysics they allowed the speculative element, which is so large a feature of fourteenth-century mysticism, to fall away, and they consequently made the positive, affirmative way of relationship with God much more prominent than the *via negativa* of the earlier mystics. In short, they were more interested in direct experience than they were in logic.

So far as one can locate any "originator" of the movement — which, after all, stands out very much like Melchizedek, without historical "father or mother" — Thomas Münzer was the first person in the Reformation period to make the living Voice or Word of God in the soul the basis of religion. The interior Teacher seemed to him the source of truth and the guide of life. He was unfortunately a loosely organized individual, lacking in balance and capable of being stirred to fanaticism. But he planted his idea in the heart of Ludwig Hetzer, translator of the Hebrew Prophets, and Hans Denck, the humanist school-master of St. Sebald School in Nuremberg, and it came to resurrection-life and power in

sounder and saner men than himself. Denck, though he is often reckoned an Anabaptist, and though for a period he endeavored to shape the development of the Anabaptists in the direction of his own ideals, belongs more distinctly in this second group. Johann Bunderlin, born in Linz, a town of Upper Austria about 1495, Christian Entfelder, who first appears as pastor of a flock in Moravia in 1527, and Sebastian Franck, born at Donauwörth in Schwabia in 1499, are other early exponents of the spiritual ideals. Caspar Schwenckfeld, born at Liegnitz in Lower Silesia in 1489, was more distinctly interested than these other leaders in the formation of a visible society—those of “the middle way”—and he created a brotherhood that has survived to the present time; but his ideas and ideals were of the general type which characterize the aim at a “spiritual” reform. Sebastian Castellio, a French humanist and opponent of Calvin, born near Geneva in 1515, and Dirck Coornhert, a prominent Dutch scholar, born in Amsterdam in 1522, are two of the noblest interpreters of these spiritual ideals and aspirations.

They were all strongly individualistic, and they felt too little the importance of the help of a visible community. They had a naïve, uncritical, and unquestioning faith in inner divine guidance and personal revelation. “The Kingdom of God,” Denck says, “is in you, and he who searches for it outside himself will never find it; for apart from God no one can either seek or find God, but he who seeks God already in truth has Him”; and again, “He who does not know God from God himself does not ever know Him.”⁸

Franck is a still more confident apostle of the inner way. Many, he says, know and teach only what they have picked up and gathered “without having experienced it in the deeps of themselves.” Hearing people read

⁸ From Denck's two tracts, *Was geredet sei*, etc., and *Vom Gesetz Gottes*.

and talk about God is "all a dead thing." The real Christian "must go inside and have the experience for himself."⁹

But in spite of the fact that they seem so individualistic and concerned with personal experience in their own souls, they are emphatically *social* in their sympathies. Like the Anabaptists, they are interested in the common man. They all alike make *love*, actual human love, the mark of fellowship with Christ. They show a fresh interest in man for his own sake. They all, with the exception of Schwenckfeld, deny the depravity of man and they refuse utterly to accept the dogma of "unfree will." They realize that human life is a frail and tragic affair, but it is, nevertheless, big with spiritual possibilities, and the most splendid fruit of life is love. "To hate everything that hinders love," is Denck's ideal of life.¹⁰ Castellio declares that Christ's way always means love. "You [meaning Calvin] may return to Moses if you will, but for us others Christ has come."¹¹ Love, he constantly insists, is the supreme badge of any true Christianity; the traits of the beatitudes in a person's life are surer evidence that he belongs to Christ's family than is the fact that he holds orthodox opinions on obscure questions of belief. Franck has expressed as well as any of the group, the way they felt about the invisible Church: "The true Church is not a separate mass of people, not a particular sect to be pointed out with the finger, not confined to one time or place; it is rather a spiritual and invisible body of all the members of Christ, born of God, of one mind, spirit, and faith, but not gathered in any one external city or place. It is a Fellowship, seen with the spiritual eye and by the inner man. It is the assembly and communion of all truly God-fearing, good-hearted, new-born persons in all the world,

⁹ Franck's *Paradoxa*, Vorrede, sec. 13. and *passim*.

¹⁰ *Vom Gesetz Gottes*, p. 12.

¹¹ Castellio's *Contra Libellum Calvini*.

bound together by the Holy Spirit in the peace of God and the bonds of love—a Communion outside of which there is no salvation, no Christ, no God, no comprehension of Scripture, no Holy Spirit, and no Gospel. I belong to this Fellowship. I believe in the Communion of saints, and I am in this Church, let me be where I may; and therefore I no longer look for Christ in ‘lo heres’ or ‘lo theres.’”¹² This Church, which the Spirit is building through the ages and in all lands, is, once more, like the experience of the individual Christian, entirely an inward affair. “Love is the one mark and badge of Fellowship in it.”¹³ No outward forms of any sort seem to him necessary for membership in this true Church. “External gifts and offices make no Christian; and just as little does the standing of the person, or locality, or time, or dress, or food, or anything external. The Kingdom of God is neither prince nor peasant, food nor drink, hat nor coat, here nor there, yesterday nor tomorrow, baptism nor circumcision, nor anything whatever that is external, but peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, unalloyed love out of a pure heart and good conscience and an unfeigned faith.”¹⁴

The Kingdom of God, as they hold, is a *kingdom of experience*, and they want every feature and detail of the religious life to spring out of experience and to assist its enlargement. “As often,” Schwenckfeld writes, “as a new warrior comes to the heavenly army, as often as a poor sinner repents, the body of Christ becomes larger, the King more splendid, His kingdom stronger, His might more perfect.”¹⁵

All these men have but the slenderest interest in sacraments. Sacraments have become for them what circumcision was for St. Paul when he wrote, “neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but

¹² Paradoxa, Vorrede, sec. 8.

¹³ Ibid., sec. 9.

¹⁴ Ibid., sec. 45.

¹⁵ Schwenckfeld's Schriften II, p. 290.

a new creation." Schwenckfeld treats this matter more profoundly than any of the others. He meditated long and deeply upon the question, studying the New Testament both broadly and minutely, while at the same time he gave much thought to the fundamental nature of the religious life. He took Judas as his test case. He argued that if baptism and the supper were efficacious in themselves, then Judas, who received the supper from the Lord himself, would have been saved by it. If the bread and wine were changed into actual body and blood of Christ, then he must have eaten of Christ and partaken of His divine nature; but no corresponding change of spirit appears in him. He came out from the supper and immediately revealed an evil spirit. Schwenckfeld finds the key to Christ's teaching on spiritual life in the Johannine account of eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood. This assimilation of Christ is for him not a figure, not a symbol, but a central fact. The risen and glorified Christ, the incorruptible life-giving substance of the God-Man, is the essential, necessary source of spiritual life for men. He must become the actual food of the soul. Not on rare occasions but continually, the true nature of Christ must be received and assimilated into the inner substance of our human spirits. No symbol can be a substitute for that actual experience: "God must Himself, apart from all external means, through Christ touch the soul, speak in it, work in it, if we are to experience salvation."¹⁶ The Church which these "reformers" were endeavoring to create was thought of as a communion or fellowship of persons who were drawn together and united by their intimate spiritual relation with the living Christ. It was a Church after the Spirit, and not an imperial institution possessed of magical authority, employing mysterious sacraments, or holding a final deposit of infallible doctrine. It was to be an

¹⁶ Schwenckfeld's Schriften I, p. 768 b.

organism rather than an organization. "No outward unity or uniformity," Schwenckfeld wrote, "either in doctrine or ceremonies or rules or sacraments, can make a Christian Church; but inner unity of Spirit, of heart, soul, and conscience in Christ and in the knowledge of Him, a unity in love and faith, does make a Church of Christ."¹⁷

Jacob Boehme, born in Silesia in 1575, more completely than any other single continental interpreter, gave a many-sided expression to the faith and aspiration of these spiritual leaders.¹⁸ He is the culmination of the movement. There are many other strands of influence in Boehme, especially the theosophical and alchemic ideas derived from Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Weigel. This latter stock of inheritance proved a heavy weight to this great tragic, but surely divinely inspired, mystic. The barbarous terminology, the baffling symbolisms, and the literary limitations of this Silesian prophet, were always a tremendous handicap; but in spite of all the obstacles, difficulties, and hindrances a real heavenly vision and a living message break through and get revealed in Boehme's books. His most important permanent contribution to Christianity is to be found in his interpretation of what he calls the *process of salvation as a way of life*. Here he is unmistakably "a spiritual reformer." He will not put up with schemes or notions. He sets himself as strongly against the substitution of doctrines of salvation for an experienced process of salvation as Luther did against the substitution of works for faith. "Thou thyself," he says, "must go through Christ's whole journey and enter wholly into his process."¹⁹ He opposes the Protestant tendency to make the Bible the basis of reformed religion — he calls that another form of "Babel-building," which does not reach all the way to

¹⁷ *Schriften II*, p. 785.

¹⁸ The influence of Schwenckfeld is most marked in Boehme.

¹⁹ True Repentance.

God. The written letter-word is no true substitute for the living Word of God in a man's soul. Theological "opinions" are only "mental idols." The "immortal seed of God" must come to birth in the soul, and Christ must *live and operate* within. Boehme once more, like his predecessors, is a builder of the invisible Church. He makes nothing of sacraments. He turns inward rather than outward. He separates religion wholly from State connection. He wants a Christianity of prophets instead of one of priests, and he calls men away from logical systems to personal experience.

The writings of nearly all these men reached England and were read by kindred spirits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. John Everard is the first scholar of importance who shows a familiarity with the body of ideas and the type of Church set forth in the little books of the spiritual reformers on the continent. He was born in 1575, the year Boehme was born; he was a master of arts and doctor of divinity from Clare College, Cambridge. He was a student of the great mystics, and later in life — after he was fifty — he translated tracts by Sebastian Franck and Hans Denck and Castellio's edition of *The Golden Book of German Divinitie*. Everard's later sermons, printed in *The Gospel Treasury Opened*, give the same general interpretation of Christianity which his continental forerunners give. He was, before everything else, a good man. He was too a man of undoubted depth and power, and he shows both style and humor. Though so often imprisoned that King James I suggested that his name should be changed from Everard [Everout] to "Dr. Never-out," yet his influence was great, and he is almost certainly the first man in England to hold and teach in any impressive way the views of the spiritual reformers. He had important disciples and many successors. The most noted of the disciples was Giles Randall, another translator of spiritual

and mystical books. Francis Rous, Peter Sterry, John Saltmarsh, and William Dell are good examples of the kind of successors whom Everard had.

Meantime other developments were under way which carried the ideas of the spiritual reformers forward into the popular consciousness more extensively than did the books and sermons of these Cambridge and Oxford scholars. Groups of the common people formed into little societies, and worked out in practice, in quiet, out-of-the-way places, the ideals of these teachers. Attempts of this sort were often made in Germany, where they were generally soon suppressed. In Holland they were much more successful, and in that country, where a semi-freedom of conscience was allowed, small sects flourished. The most important of these independent sects were the societies of the Collegiants, who held the fundamental ideas of the spiritual reformers, with the added belief that the present existing Church is only an interim-church, and that God will soon send a new apostle, supernaturally endowed and equipped, to be the beginner, the founder, of the true Church of Christ. For this event they looked and waited, and thus were called "Seekers." They held that no one had the efficacious authority and power to administer sacraments or to be the bearer of an authoritative ministry-message. They therefore met in silence and waited for the Spirit to direct them. They looked after their own poor, watched carefully over the moral life—the "walk and conversation"—of their membership. They were socially minded and made love and fellowship the marks of their communion. They were opposed to oaths, and to the taking of human life, and in other ways they showed their connection with the common man's reformation in the sixteenth century. During the period of the English Commonwealth numerous groups of similar sects appeared in England. They had strong, substantial members, and their leaders—for

they had unordained leaders — were able men and excellent guides. Many other sects swarmed as the degree of freedom increased. There were groups of the Family of Love, who were followers of the mystic, Henry Nicholas, born in Westphalia in 1501. There were Ranters, who were pantheists and frequently were morally loose and antinomian. In the years between 1646 and 1661 all the writings of Jacob Boehme were translated into English, and now became a positive and powerful force, profoundly influencing such intellectual men as Sir Isaac Newton and John Milton,²⁰ and forming the basic religious conceptions of many less noted persons. All these lines, including the groups of Anabaptists, converge and receive their consummate expression in the Society of Friends, which under the leadership of George Fox spread throughout the English counties between 1648 and 1691, the latter date being the year of George Fox's death.

More important, however, than the formation of any religious organization was the silent propagation of truths and ideas which spread across the world as winged seeds fly abroad in the autumn. The contagion of thought from mind to mind, from person to person, without any visible organization, carried these ideals broadcast. They became winnowed of chaff as time sifted them, and they gained in weight and value as they lost their capricious and erratic aspects. They heightened as they received interpretation at the hands of wise and balanced thinkers, and gradually they won the standing which their discoverers could never succeed in giving them. Philosophical movements unconsciously coöperated toward a preparation of groups of people of ideals similar to those of the spiritual reformers. Social and political forces also became their allies. The religious and political experiments in the American colonies assisted greatly in shaping thought in the same direction, and the revolutions

²⁰ See Bailey's *Milton and Jacob Boehme* (New York, 1914).

carried through by the people in America and in France helped immensely to establish the principle of free conscience, separation of Church and State, the inalienable right of a man to be religious in his own way, while the unorganized but irresistible forces of literature in Europe and America, especially from Wordsworth's time onwards, worked silently and powerfully to emphasize inward religion — the religion of the Spirit — and to make dogma and ecclesiasticism less important. We find ourselves at last in a world wholly changed from that which the great reformers, the major reformers, endeavored to make. Their ideals are not our ideals. Their conception of the Church is largely dead or dying. We are, it must be admitted, not in the world of the spiritual reformers, but at the same time their ideals are much more nearly our ideals, their spirit is kindred with ours, and if they could become *revenant*, they would feel at home with us now and would join heartily in spiritual communion and fellowship in any of our live, active, forward-looking church-groups today.